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Trauma in Autobiographical Videogames: The Case of *Father and I* (2012)

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Abstract: Although trauma and memory have been a focus of cultural studies for more than twenty years now, few scholarly works focus on medium-specific representations of trauma and even fewer comment on the tendency of trauma representations to be autobiographical in the 21st Century. The present paper is part of a larger project that seeks to tackle precisely these issues. Here, I look at the representation of trauma in a relatively recent autobiographical video game, namely Vince Caballero's *Father and I* (2012). I argue that the use of trauma as a trope adds a further narrative demand to video games, making it even more difficult to negotiate the specificities of the medium. At the same time, however, it functions as a stock story that enhances the narrative dimensions of the game under discussion.

Since the early 2000s, several more or less successful attempts have been made to render autobiographical stories in videogame form. Most of these games are mods, i.e. art modifications for different games, short interactive mini-games, or, more rarely, longer, complex indie games. What they all have in common is that they are not meant for mainstream audiences, but seen as art – attempts to experiment self-narration in a new medium of storytelling. In the first part of this paper, I offer an overview of contemporary autobiographical video games and show that autobiographical video games depicting trauma are often the most successful with players and critics alike. In the second part of this paper, I analyze a relatively recent autobiographical video game which depicts trauma, namely *Father and I* (2012). I argue that the use of trauma as a trope adds a further narrative demand to video games, making it even more difficult to negotiate the specificities of the medium. At the same time, however, it functions as a stock story that enhances the narrative dimensions of the game under discussion.

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Stories in Video Games from the Arcade to the Autobiographical Video Game

Perhaps the most debated issue within Games Studies has historically been whether the study of video games should be guided by theories and methods unique to the digital, or whether theoretical models developed to explain other cultural forms such as narrative, theater, and film can be applied to them instead. Especially during the 1990s, when the field was first established, the discussions centered on whether video games could or should be expected to tell stories. Directly related to this was the question of whether they could be considered fiction. These two issues fed directly into the debate about the cultural value of video games and gamer culture, a debate that was reminiscent of the moments when film and comics first entered academia.

The first time the issue of narrative was raised was to point out the differences between video games and other media. This has become known among experts as the Ludology vs. Narratology debate. Ludology is a term introduced by Gonzalo Frasca to refer to the idea that "games cannot be understood through theories derived from narrative" (Frasca). Aarseth went so far as to call using the methodologies developed for narrative media "academic colonialism" (48-49). One of the most influential studies that takes its cue from this idea is Jesper Juul's *Half-Real*, which argues that video games must be defined by something other than narrative because they contain incoherencies that cannot be narratively motivated. He explains this by referring to the defining characteristic of video games: that of having rules (Juul 123-124). The most notable of these rules, which is true for all video games, is the possibility of winning.

While it is of course true that games have rules in the way in which other narrative media do not, nothing stops game designers from using rules to create narrative meaning. Mark J.P. Wolf makes useful distinction concerning this, i.e. that between the diegetic and the extradiegetic world of video games. For him, the diegetic world is made up of all that is interactive in a game, while the extradiegetic world is composed of two elements. First, the extradiegetic world is defined as it is in film theory as including all elements of which the characters are not aware (lighting, sound, text, voice-over narration). In this case, it includes cutscenes. Secondly, it includes the player's knowledge of the storyworld before even starting the game. This includes any storyworlds that are adapted from other media as well as genre conventions that help the player imagine a narrative world with few prompts (100-103). It results from this that much of the narrative in video games is the work of the player, whether we talk about the player's literal involvement with the game or the work of imagination that goes into constructing a narrative from paratext and knowledge and schemata the player had before starting the game.

A similar idea is reiterated by Mary Laure Ryan when she claims that the narrative world is not just what we see on screen but is a result of the player's participation in imagining that world,

> But I would like to draw a distinction between "world" as a set of rules and tokens, and "world" as imaginary space, furnished with individuated objects. The pieces of a chess game may be labeled king, queen, bishop, or knight, but chess players do not relate to them as fictional persons, nor do they imagine a royal court, a castle, an army, and a war between rival kingdoms. (307)

While cognitive narratology's main claim is quite similar to this, as it points to the work readers of literary texts do in constructing a narrative, it seems to me that games rely on this quite a lot more than textual narratives. In the case of games, players intervene both by interacting with the narrative and by the act of reading it.

Early video games like *Pong* (1972) were virtual versions of physical games or sports, which focus more on mastering rules and skills. However, other early video games, such as *Spacewar!* (1962), even if they did not tell a story in the traditional sense, borrowed storyworlds from pulp genres which carried with them certain conventions that would allow players to read a story into these games. Furthermore, it became obvious, with the advent of *Night Driver* (1976) and the first person point of view, that video games had a certain focalization. *Pac-Man* (1980) and *Super Mario* (1985) showed that characters were possible and played an important role for players in games. As technology advanced, games like *King's Quest* (1984) allowed the player to move and manipulate space in games, thus introducing temporality. Finally, what text-based games like *Adventure* (1980) or *Zork* (1977) showed was that at least some players craved stories in video games even though at the time technology did not allow it in any other form. A departure from text when it came to storytelling, I would argue, only became possible once the point-and-click interface was created.

Technological advances in the 1990s, namely developments in graphic hardware, the introduction of CD-ROMs, and the advent of the computer network, especially of the Internet, resulted in a video-game boom. During this decade, games became three dimensional and relied more and more on the first-person perspective. Multiplayer first-person shooters like *Delta Force* (1977) became very popular, as did a hybrid genre of action-adventure game typified by such games as *Tomb Raider* (1996), *Half Life* (1998), or *Unreal* (1998). *Tomb Raider* is especially noteworthy because of its iconic character, Lara Croft, an archeologist on a mission to retrieve missing artefacts. Lara was endowed with a well-defined personality that became the epitome of cool and a symbol for the girl-power movement during that period, spawning numerous re-mediations. As the decade progressed, games increased in narrative complexity with games like *Myst* (1994), *Fallout* (1997), *Baldur's Gate* (1998), or *Planscape: Torment* (1999). Especially the latter offered a complex narrative known for its philosophical musings that were atypical for video games at that time.

Because the new network technology permitted it, real-time strategy games were developed. Games such as *Dune II* (1992) or *WarCraft* (1994) required the management of resource while at the same time combatting an enemy. These are RPGs that can be traced back to the old multi-player text-based MUDs and that eventually developed into massive multiplayer online playing games, one the first popular ones being *Ultima Online* (1997), while the all-time most notorious one is *World of Warcraft* (2004). Unlike in other RPGs, players create their own characters in these games, and the story unfolds in their interaction with other players. The world of these games is open-ended and continues to evolve while the players are offline.

Depending on how much they focused on rules rather than narrative, Henry Jenkins pointed to the existence of four categories of video game narratives: evoked narratives, enacted narratives, embedded narratives, and emergent narratives. Evoked narratives are those in which video games reproduce a world that is familiar because it is borrowed from another work. In enacted narratives, "the story itself may be structured around the character's movement through space and the features of the environment may retard or accelerate that plot trajectory" (Jenkins). Embedded narratives are those in which "the game space becomes a memory palace whose contents must be deciphered as the player tries to reconstruct the plot" (Jenkins). A prime example of this would be any number of detective games. Emergent narratives are those in which "game spaces are designed to be rich with narrative potential, enabling the story-constructing activity of players" (Jenkins). To this category belong simulation games, such as *Sims*, social networking games, such as *Second Life*, strategy games like the *Civilization* series, and MMOPRGs such as *War of Warcraft*.

During the past two decades, hundreds of video games (many of them sequels and remakes) were released, ever more technically ambitious and expensive, so that the game industry is comparable with the film industry at this point. At the same time, easy access to knowledge about game design and accessible hardware have led to an upsurge of experimental indie games made by individuals or independent production companies. It is within this part of the industry that autobiographical games appeared in the form of mods or full games. In what follows, I will offer a tentative overview of the types of autobiographical games that exist to this date.

There are two notable autobiographical video games that were created as mods, i.e. modifications of a previous game. One of them was created by Mary Flanagan as an art modification of the game *Unreal Tournament* (2003) and is called *[domestic]*. In *[domestic]*, the player experiences the space of the author's childhood memory of returning from church and finding her house on fire, with her father trapped inside. As the fire envelops the represented space, the player is meant to defeat it with the use of so-called 'coping mechanisms.' Flanagan uses two methods to invoke her memory of that moment: text and childhood photographs. The text sometimes takes the form of poetic narratives of the event: "Through the fields on the path The house looks changed Smoke coming out of the windows Where is dad?" (*[domestic]*). At other times, words stand in for objects in the spaces represented. The player in the game is positioned in the first-person perspective in which she does not see any avatar on screen but can simply direct the gaze of the 'camera.'

The second notable mod of a traditional video game used to render autobiography is JP LeBreton's mod of *Doom II*, called *Autobiographical Architecture* (2016). Scenes from the *Doom* series blend and feed into environments and moments from LeBreton's life, the life of a level designer. According to the author, the game is meant to be a tribute to the game which accompanied him through the most important moments of his life. It uses the same perspective as Flanegan's game, with the difference that the tableau's from LeBreton's life, such as him riding a bicycle or walking the halls of his highschool, alternate with regular shooter gameplay. As opposed to the situation in *[domestic]*, not much text is included in *Autobiographical Architecture*.

The second notable category of autobiographical games are autobiographical mini games. They are short and relatively uncomplicated in terms of their rules of gameplay, as well as graphics. This endows them with a level of abstraction uncommon in video games. Moreover, they are always accompanied by extensive paratexts explaining how the particular set of rules that constitutes the game relates to the author's life. The most notable of these games are those of Jason Rohrer from 2007 and 2008, *Passage* and *Gravitation*, respectively, whichhave garnered extensive critical attention since their release and are often quoted in debates on the status of video games as art. As such, they are often exhibited in art museums across the United States, and, in 2012, they became part of the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Rohrer's most influential game, *Passage*, is two megabytes and lasts only five minutes. It is two-dimensional and the action is displayed in a thin horizontal window. The player controls the protagonist and can move left and right. The game world can be glimpsed through a small window as the male avatar surmounts various obstacles to gain points. A second character soon appears in the game – a woman, whom the male avatar can choose to marry or not. If the marriage option is chosen, the game increases in difficulty as the two characters navigate the world together. As the game progresses, the characters visibly age and eventually die.

Similarly, *Gravitation* contains two characters, a playable male avatar and a female character who interacts with the protagonist. The screen is square but not consistently of the same size. The player has two tasks in the game. One is to interact with the female character, who always remains at the bottom of the screen and throws balls at him. As he returns the balls, the screen widens, and the player has an extended view of the environment. Too much time spent at the bottom, though, causes the protagonist's head to catch on fire. The second task of the player is to move upwards and collect stars. As the avatar moves upwards, however, the screen shrinks so that the task becomes impossible, so that the player is forced to descend to the bottom periodically. These activities cannot be done infinitely, however, as the game has a timer. Before the times runs out, the female character disappears and all that is left of her is the ball that she had been throwing. By the end of the game, it is not possible for all rewards to be collected, so that the protagonist dies before he can win.

Both *Passage* and *Gravitation* are highly allegorical and require that the player to speculate about their meaning. This need for speculation is prompted by both the knowledge (offered in paratexts) that these games are autobiographical and by the rules of the games themselves. Unlike typical games, there is no possibility for the player to win these games. While these two games are the best known of the category I have just described, there are many others like them, and their number is progressively increasing. The game *dys4ia* by Anna Anthropy, for example, is an account of her transgender transformation and is designed in a similar fashion. *Farsh* by Mahdi Bahrami invites the player to roll carpets in various ways as a tribute to his Iranian mother's craft, which he remembers from childhood. Sophie Houlden's *the.domestic* gives the player the task of following her attempts to reconcile her home and

work chores. Perhaps as the culmination of all these games, Alex Camilleri's *Memoir En Code* offers the player a series of shorter embedded games, in which she navigates the occurrences of the author's daily life.

The fourth category of autobiographical games available today are text-based ones such as Zoe Quinn's *Depression Quest* (2013) and Cara Ellison's *Sacrilege* (2014). *Depression Quest* depicts Quinn's struggle with depression. *Depression Quest* is an interactive fiction game which presents descriptions of various situations and prompts the player to choose a response. In addition, most pages feature a set of still images and atmospheric music. The game has over 40,000 words of text and multiple possible endings. Players assume the role of a person suffering from depression, and the story centers on their daily life, including encounters at work and their relationship with a partner. The story also features various treatments for depression. Players are periodically faced with choices that alter the course of the story. To make a choice, the player must click on the corresponding hyperlink. However, choices are often crossed out and cannot be clicked on, a mechanism that *Depression Quest* uses to portray the character's mental state and the fact that logical decisions may not be available to them. Beneath the choices presented to the player are a set of statements about the character, indicating their level of depression, whether or not they are in therapy, and whether or not they are currently on medication.Similarly, *Sacrilege* uses text and hyperlink as the main mechanism for action from the player. The player assumes the role of a young woman in a dance club as she navigates her romantic options. In the games, there are four options embodied by four men: Matthew, John, Mark, and Luke, obvious allusions to the biblical characters. This is a dating simulation game that is impossible to win. Irrespective of the choice the player makes, the relationship ends badly.

Both *Depression Quest* and *Sacrilege* are more akin to the hypertext fiction of the 1990s than contemporary mainstream game. Literalizing the efforts of such classics as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Jorge Luis Borges' *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1941), Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962), Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela* (1963), or Italo Calvino's *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* (1973), hypertext fiction, such as Michael Joyce's *afternoon* (1987), Stuart Moulthrop's *Victory Garden* (1991), and Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995), or Mark Amerika's *GRAMMATRON* (1997), places the reader in a participatory position when it comes to the creation of the plot. Based on the choices the reader makes and the hyperlinks she follows, the ending of the story is different. As a consequence of their similarity to hypertext fiction, *Depression Quest* and *Sacrilege* raise the question of whether they are to be considered games, stories, or interactive art. Debates about their status touch the core of the issues relating to the role of narrative in video games that have been at the forefront of Game Studies since the field was created. These are especially salient for autobiographical video games, especially those narrating trauma, for reasons I will discuss in the following section of this paper.

Finally, the last category of autobiographical games are full-length games that are more similar to popular first-person action-adventure role playing games. Some of these, such as *Cibele* (2015) and *The Beginner's Guide* (2015), rely heavily on the audience's knowledge and experience of video games to get the story across. Video games themselves become the backdrop for the story told so that the autobiographical narrative unfolds in the process of the player playing a player who is playing the games. Thus, Nina Freedman's *Cibele* becomes a narrative of the author's teenage self and her experience with video games, video game culture, and socializing within that culture. The player navigates a simulated desktop computer interface to follow a budding online romance. The story is based on the experiences of Nina Freeman, the game designer, and its simulated environment is that of her personal computer. In *Cibele*, the player can rummage through Freeman's personal files, including emails, photos, and journals, and pursue quests in a mock massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) to advance the story. The mock multiplayer game, *Valtameri*, is designed to be incidental to the relationship that develops between Nina and Blake. The game's story is divided into three acts spanning six months. The two begin as part of a team of *Valtameri* players but eventually spend more time without the group. As the game advances, they share compliments and contact information and decide to meet in person, outside of the mock multiplayer game.

Like *Cibele*, *The Beginner's Guide* uses a computer interface as the background for its autobiographical narrative. The game is narrated by Davey Wreden, the author of the game, and takes the user through a number of incomplete and abstract game creations made by a developer named Coda, who in the game is presented as Wreden's friend. Wreden challenges the player to try to come to understand the type of person Coda is from exploring these spaces in a first-person perspective. Within the narrative, the player discovers that Wreden modified Coda's games in what he sees as an attempt to make them better. At the same time, Wreden's interpretations of Coda's works – rendered in voice-over, overshadow any interpretation the player might attempt in relation to the games she plays. At the end of the game, the player finds out that it was precisely Wreden's overwhelming attitude that ended the friendship between him and Coda.

Finally, the games I analyze in detail in the final part of this paper are both full-length autobiographical games built in the shape of a first-person action-adventure RPG. The first game I will analyze is *Father and I* (2012), which tells the story of Vince Caballero's childhood when he suffered abuse from his alcoholic father. The second one, *That Dragon, Cancer* (2016), depicts Amy Greens' experience of raising her son Joel, who was diagnosed with terminal cancer at twelve months old, and though only given a short time to live, continued to survive for four more years before eventually succumbing to the disease. Interestingly, these two games have been the most critically acclaimed, as well as commercially successful, of the autobiographical video games discussed here. In this paper, I ultimately wish to show that they were aided by their use of trauma narrative in their construction. My argument is that, even though video games are not primarily narrative, they often find ways to shift focus on stories through various techniques. Most of the time they do so by relying on other more narrative-inclined media, such as text or film. These particular games, however, rely most heavily on the tropes of trauma narratives that are so prevalent in other media today. In what follows, I will discuss the characteristics of the trauma trope in order to better understand why autobiographical trauma games are so popular with high-brow opinion makers.

The Trauma Trope

According to traditional trauma theory, which became popular in the 1990s, trauma is defined by belatedness, literality, and unrepresentabilty. In her edited volume *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as “a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts stemming from the event” (4). These responses to trauma represent a singular experience that is too shocking to process and is encoded in memory differently, most often as an image that cannot be transformed into narrative. Because trauma allegedly remains unprocessed in memory, it can only be represented through a certain kind of language: “trauma must be spoken in a language that is always somehow literary, a language that defies, even as it claims our understanding” (Caruth 5).

This conception of trauma privileges the silent witness as the one entitled to speak about trauma. Dori Laub famously said that, “the imperative to tell the story of the Holocaust is inhabited by the impossibility of telling and, therefore, silence about the truth commonly prevails” (79). This insistence that trauma can only be represented through silence, or at least through metaphorical or allegorical language, shows trauma theory’s roots in post-structuralist theory. Laub echoes Lyotard’s injunction, “Let us wage war on totality; Let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable” (82). Somewhat contradictorily then, Caruth argues that trauma is universal, providing the “very link between cultures” (11), as though silences have the same meaning in different cultures. Thus, the first-person narrative of the witness that speaks through silence became the norm for trauma narratives.

While not necessarily part of mainstream trauma theory, Ruth Leys points at Freud’s first theory of trauma, which she calls the mimetic one. This theory equates the mechanism of trauma with the birth of the self (32). Quoting the theories of Anna Freud and Sandor Ferenczi, she shows that the logic of Freud’s writing on trauma led his disciples to hypothesize an identification between the victim of trauma and the aggressor, in which the self is unbound and returned to a state of non-selfhood. Such a process would also explain the victim’s lack of memory of trauma. After all, before the self was constituted, recollection was impossible.

The staple definition of trauma, which comprises most of the above-mentioned elements, has come under criticism from more than one side. Laura Brown, for instance, coins the notion of insidious trauma, i.e. “the chronic psychic suffering produced by the structural violence of racial, gender, sexual, class, and other inequities” (Craps 55), which is routinely ignored when Caruth’s definition is used to identify trauma. Michael Rothberg points out “the necessity of […] of broadening and differentiating our understanding of what trauma is, along with our account of the conditions under which it is produced" (xvii), suggesting that the claim that the Western definition of trauma is universal only serves to exclude other types of trauma. Finally, feminist discussions of trauma see speaking out as an act of acquiring agency and read the necessity for silence when speaking about trauma as a way of dismissing attitudes that break with the *status quo* which "aligns nicely with the discomfort experienced by a cultural elite that has the power to censor difficult materials and determine what is in good taste" (Tolmie xi).

When it comes to trauma narratives, trauma is shaped not only by the prescriptions of trauma theory, but also by the demands of narration and those of the medium of narration. According to Peter Brooks, "plot starts when quiescence is stimulated into a state of narratability" (291). Punctual trauma is thus better suited for narrative than insidious trauma because a singular traumatic event can act as a catalyst for narrative. Insidious trauma, on the other hand, is hard to fit into a narrative structure because even experimental narrative presumably needs elements that would make it recognizable as narrative.

Trauma narratives are also shaped by the demands of the medium in which they appear. In his work *The Trauma Question*, Roger Luckhurst notes that "cultural forms have been inextricably bound with some central concepts [of trauma theory]: the traumatic 'flashback' is borrowed from cinema, multiple personality has always shadowed the literature of the double, whilst the notion of recovering pristine recovered memories, as it developed in 1980s, was linked to cultural technologies like television and the video recorder" (80). While video games borrow many literary and filmic techniques to represent trauma, they also add another dimension to it, namely interactivity. This brings the idea of vicariousness and transferability when it comes to trauma to the foreground in such texts.

Considering all this, it is perhaps not surprising that the trauma trope is so widespread in American literature and film – some have even ventured to call this popularity an industry in its own right. Trauma, with its demands for literality and visuality, lends itself well to the techniques of film, as well as to those of the type of literature when trauma became popular in the 1990s, itself influenced by filmic representations. Moreover, trauma trope's claim to a psychological ailment permits even the most experimental of texts to be read in a realistic key. As such, its transfer to life writing is presumably smooth. But how does the trauma trope adjust to the demands of video games? And what do video games have to gain from representing it? This is what I seek to discuss in the following analysis.

***Father and I* (2012)**

The video game *Father and I* (2012), originally released as *Papo y Yo,* is an autobiographical video game that tells the story of its creator Vander Caballero's troubled childhood. It features a young South American boy who goes on a journey with his robot, Lula, and a creature known in the game as "Monster." The boy's relationship with Monster is meant to represent that of Caballero and his father, who was a violent alcoholic and drug addict. Like the Monster in the game, Caballero's father was sometimes kind and loving, and sometimes violent and cruel. In describing how he wrote and designed the game, Caballero comments on the difficulties of rendering narrative in the medium of video games,

> It's about telling your story through a simulation, and you have to use simulation rules to tell the story. And that can be really hard. It requires a lot of know-how, it requires a lot of systems, it requires a lot of experience and failure to get there, so it took me a long time to

> figure that out. I don't want to make a game where you just say, ‘Oh, I'll put a cinematic there,’ because it doesn’t work that way.

In what follows, I seek to show that *Father and I* does indeed use the “rules of simulation” to tell a story. I wish to argue that this is possible because it tells a story of trauma. The trauma trope functions in the game as extradiegetic narration in the interpretation of Mark J.P. Wolf, i.e. as knowledge that the player brings to the table.

Father and I is not only the story of the trenches of living day to day with an abusive parent, but also a story of the trauma suffered in the wake of a particular event. This, however, is not obvious from the first. The game starts with a cutscene in which the protagonist is hiding in his closet as his father drunkenly walks by the door. Terrified, he jumps through a portal on the wall and lands in different space, one that resembles an uncanny deserted favela. Immediately, the player encounters the only other human character in the game, a young girl. As if playing, the girl makes the protagonist chase her and instructs him what do to next in the first three scenes – “A Strange New World,” “Bridging the Gap” and “Rise to the occasion.”

The titles of these three sequences already foreshadow the action of the game. I argue that the girl, with whom the protagonist keeps attempting to catch up throughout the game, in fact represents a part of his ego that was split by trauma. The ultimate goal of the game, although this becomes obvious only at the end, is for him to be reunited with her – for them to become one again, so that the trauma can be elevated into the level of consciousness. In fact, the game constantly uses the up-down spatial metaphor, in which up signifies the cure while down signifies the falling back into the memory of trauma. This first becomes obvious as the player is just about to catch up with the girl, only to be interrupted by a cutscene which has the main character fall through the ground into a flashback of the moment of trauma.

In the flashback, the player finds himself as the character in a dark alley in the rain (Figure 14). While the player can still control the character, his movement is slow and awkward. Turning a corner, we are shown the main character in the backseat of a car which is driven by his father. He is seen clutching a toy robot. Interestingly, the boy appears twice in these scenes, as his present self, and as his past self. It is not until the second flashback in the game that the moment of trauma is shown, however. The second flashback occurs after the seventh part of the game, when the protagonist again falls through the floor. It is identical to the first in terms of where the player begins to move towards the car. However, when arriving at the car, we are shown a later moment in time when the father has stepped out of the car and is hovering over a dead body that is on the ground. Once the scene of trauma is reached, the point of view switches so that the player views it from inside the car. It then becomes apparent that the shadow of the father is the monster, holding a smoking gun. This is the shocking event that triggered the trauma: the protagonist saw his father murdering another man. The shift in point of view that is produced by the revelation of the moment of trauma acts as a metaphor for the reinteriorization and reintegration of the self in the wake of the narration of the traumatic.

This scene provides the key in which the metaphor of the gameworld is to be understood: the monster is a metaphor for the boy’s father. Moreover, it pinpoints the exact moment when the boy started imagining the favela world in order to deal with his trauma. Interestingly, the moment in which the father shoots the other man is never shown, and, as a consequence, the game complies with the demand of trauma theory that trauma be represented through silence. The metaphors in the game are also a way of avoiding the literal representation of the traumatic event. Thus, the world of the favela becomes an imaginary double of the real world in which the story of trauma is told metaphorically. The father becomes the monster, and the little girl becomes the part of the psyche that experienced trauma.

The way the monster behaves in the favela world is revealing about how the father must have behaved in the real world. The monster is introduced in the fifth part of the game, “Forbearing Shadows,” in a menacing manner: while the boy walks through a tunnel, the monster walks above, so that only his shadow can be seen. The first actual encounter sees the monster asleep. Even so, to get to him, the player needs to lead the playing character through a downward spiraling path, which in the logic of the game signifies getting closer to the trauma. Up until the eighth part of the game, the monster appears to be a rather docile creature. He follows the boy around when he is lured with food and falls asleep immediately after he runs out of food. The boy is even helped by the monster, who allows him to climb on top of him to get to places that are too high up for the boy to reach. In this form, the monster resembles an endearing drunkard who requires the same amount of care as a small child. However, the monster turns menacing when he eats living things (frogs) instead of coconuts. Once this happens, he enters rage mode and attempts to kill the little boy.

The monster enters rage mode periodically, functioning as another level on which trauma is repeated, thus fulfilling once more the demand of intrusive events as proposed by trauma theory. Significantly, through most of the game, the player learns how to keep the monster’s rage in check by hiding the frogs, trapping him, and giving him a special kind of coconut. This gives the impression that the monster’s rage is directly connected to the actions of the player, which is strengthened by the girl’s statement to the boy: “He cannot control himself. Only you can cure the monster.” The relationship that the boy has to the monster is a metaphor for the identification of the victim with the perpetrator, as expounded by trauma theory. The boy believes that the monster is violent because the child failed to stop him.

Progressively, however, the monster can no longer be controlled, even though greater effort is put into the endeavor. This is signified visually as well, as the day gradually advances into dusk and the weather becomes menacing. The boy not only progressively loses clothing items until he is left wearing only shorts, but he also becomes weaker, which reveals the toll that the situation is taking on him. The gameworld itself seems to disintegrate as the favela background morphs into white abstract geometric forms. Thus, as in the definition of trauma, the disruptive symptoms of trauma appear belatedly. This culminates in the 14th part of the game, appropriately named "Anger Management," the player is tasked with trapping monster into an intricate series of boxes within a labyrinth in order to squeeze out his anger. This is done to no avail, yet the interactive gameplay is interrupted by a cut scene in which the boy and the girl are finally reunited. The girl even states: "We are one now," as markings that mirror hers appear on the boy's body.

At the end of the scene, the monster murders the girl. This heart-wrenching moment represents the boy's realization that he is not to blame for the monster's actions, and that, furthermore, he is the victim. Indeed, in the last part of the game, "Growing up," it is revealed that neither is there a shaman, nor a cure for the monster. What is offered instead is the key for the action of the game; the monster becomes the father and the frogs are revealed to stand in for alcohol. In the end, the player has to bait the monster with dead bodies of the little girl and push him off the ledge of the favela world that by now has turned upside down. The final cutscene sees the boy returning to his bedroom as the game is revealed to be a story of overcoming trauma by recognizing the perpetrator and disengaging from him.

The story of trauma functions as what Mark J.P. Wolf calls extradiegetic world, so that it endows the rules of the game with metaphorical meaning. For example, it is quite frequent that video games have a guide in the game. This character is typically one that teaches the player the rules of the game. The girl in *Father and I* fulfills this role through most of the game. Thus, she teaches the protagonist where to go by making him chase her. She is also the one who provides information about the goal of the game: she tells the boy that he is cursed and he has to find a cure for the monster. Once the boy and the girl are reunited, the girl becomes the part of the ego that experienced trauma and was split from the one that cannot remember it. The player can then retroactively reinterpret the story. As a result, her role as guide is legitimized within the trauma narrative: she is the part of the ego that experienced trauma and was split off, so she has more knowledge of the trauma.

Once the two halves of the ego are reunited in the last part, it becomes clear that the game cannot be won on its own terms: the monster cannot be cured, he needs to be abandoned. However, throughout the game, the task of curing the monster represents the goal that must be reached in order to win the game. In this manner, the task of finding the shaman and curing the monster is straightforward enough to motivate the progression through the game. Had the player known from the beginning of the game that the real task is that of curing a little boy's trauma, the tone may have been too somber for the game to be enjoyed for the rewards it provides for following the rules, e.g. moving on to the next level.

The fact that the world of the favela represents the mental world of the boy is also revealed relatively late in the game, during the second flashback. It is then that we realize that the monster is a stand-in for the father through the shadow on the wall mentioned above. This is also symbolized through the spanning of the camera from a third-person perspective to a first-person perspective so that the player sees through the character's eyes. The camera then zooms as though retreating into the character's mind. Moreover, the objects in the car are used to construct the imaginary narrative; there, the boy is clutching a toy robot, who in the favela world aids him in accomplishing his missions The claustrophobic space of the car is contrasted in the imaginary world with the ability to modify space (– another metaphor for the blame that the boy puts on himself. The implication is that if he had been able to modify space, i.e. be able to escape the locked car, he might have been able to stop his father from killing. All of this also alludes to the difficulty of processing trauma in memory literally, as well as to the role of imagination in curing trauma.

Conclusion

While *Father and I* functions as a typical game for the most part, the introduction of the narrative of trauma in installments works to hide its rules retroactively by turning the mechanics of the game into allegories. Thus, the guide becomes a part of the ego, the puzzles become mental processes, and finding the shaman becomes finding a cure for trauma. The trauma narrative, though, is rendered in its entirety in cutscenes. If we were to separate the cutscenes from the gameplay and watch them back to back, we would still understand the story of the boy's trauma. The most information about his ailment is revealed perhaps in the last cutscene where the allegories of the game are translated and the player-character is instructed by a magical flame what the real way to win the game and cure the trauma is: letting the monster go. The narrative of trauma then is rendered through controlled cinematic and verbal means, rather than interactively. This means that it is an embedded narrative, according to Jenkins' definition, i.e. the player has relatively little influence over the story, even though she has some control over parts of the plot.

To conclude, Vander Caballero's autobiographical game, *Father and I* (2012), tells the story of his relationship with his alcoholic father. The story is told in the form of a trauma narrative as it contains intrusive flashbacks, the victim identifies with the perpetrator, there is a split of the ego, and the trauma is represented indirectly, through allegories, so that it remains unspoken. While the trauma is rendered in the game by introducing elements from more narrative media (film and verbal narratives), by the end of the game the narrative of trauma helps the player retroactively endow the interactive elements of the game with allegorical meaning, so that no inconsistencies are apparent in the story by the end of the game.

By rendering trauma in video-game form, Caballero successfully created a text that banks on the ubiquity of the trauma trope to allow for the non-narrative elements of video games to be read in a narrative key. In a manner similar to how games like *Spacewar*! utilize pulp fiction to create what Jenkins termed evoked narratives, video games which depict trauma use the player's familiarity with the trauma trope to make games more narrative. At the same time, video games prove to be a fertile medium for the depiction of trauma as it is defined by traditional trauma theory by foregrounding the participatory and interrelational dimension of how the meaning of trauma is created through interactivity.

Thanks to the ubiquity of the trauma trope in contemporary culture, video games, by tackling trauma, are given access to the realm of more narrative media. What I ultimately wish to suggest is that narrativity itself holds considerable cultural capital, narrative media being considered more serious than non-narrative media. In addition to this, the autobiographical dimension of the game discussed here functions in a similar manner, i.e. endows the game with more traction in high-brow circles. It remains to be seen if other games will follow suit in a quest to being accepted by the academia, through the use of trauma narratives and the autobiographical genre.

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